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ABSTRACT

The concept of professorial melancholia is introduced and discussed. Professorial melancholia is defined as a progressive emotional process characterized by the negating of a university professor's professional motivation, positive attitudinal focus, and adequate personal self-esteem. The beliefs and environmental and personal factors found in the academic life that contribute to the three stages of professorial melancholia are discussed. Two irrational beliefs, that one must excel in all areas and be loved/approved of by everyone, are considered to be underlying factors, which may be exacerbated by the transition from being a graduate student to being a faculty member, with the resultant changes in the nature of relationships with both students and faculty and change from a nurturing to a non-nurturing environment. The three stages are defined as early (where causal factors are beginning to have their detrimental effect), middle (where the influence of the initial causal factor is progressing and having a noticeable impact), and late (where the impact on the professor's environment, performance and lifestyle is most noticeable and negative). Counseling treatment that directly addresses the professorial role dysfunction is recommended. It is considered vital for therapists to see these issues in their totality, as important lifestyle and life support concerns that need to be addressed. Contains 19 references. (KM)

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A Discourse on Professorial Melancholia

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Abstract

This clinical treatise discusses this author's concept of "professorial melancholia," a progressive emotional process characterized by the negating of a university professor's professional motivation, positive attitudinal focus, and adequate personal self-esteem.

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Dr. Machell is also an active author having published numerous articles in his speciality areas, such as *Deprivation in American Affluence: The Theory of Stimulus Addiction, Fellowship as an Important Factor in the Residential Treatment of Alcoholism, The Lethality of the Corporate Image to the Recovering Corporate Executive Alcoholic,* and *The Recovering Alcoholic in For-Profit Alcoholism Treatment Salesmanship: A Psychological Risk*. His published Fordham University doctoral dissertation is titled, *Belongingness-The Critical Variable in the Residential Treatment of Alcoholism*.

A Discourse on Professorial Melancholia

Introduction

As a university professor and counseling psychologist, I have observed and explored for many years the machinations of the professorate at numerous colleges and universities. This article documents the results of countless discussions, interviews, reflections, and observations with colleagues and clients that have disclosed that, although many professors are fully functional and expressive, many are found to be in various states of emotional disarray, disquiet, and dysfunction.

This study is a clinical treatise which tries to describe and explain in the format of a systematic conceptualization the etiology of professorial emotional dysfunction, here referred to as "professorial melancholia." The term "melancholia" in this article is similar in some respects to the definition as found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM III-R) of the American Psychiatric Association, but does take some liberties with this notion in order to expand this idea from a simpler symptom profile to the progressive cycle of behavior related to the peculiarites of this professional role. Professorial melancholia, as originated and expressed in this article, is divided into early stage, middle stage, and late stage symptomologies, also discussed is its possible expansion into other emotional disorders.

This statement is written with devotion and concern. Hopefully, this information will foster self-insight and self-reflection within the professorate, contributing to prevention efforts on personal and organizational levels. It should be noted that although this discussion is a generalization to the professorate as a whole, this is reasonable since many mental and physical disorders are profiled in a general and universal manner, understanding that in reality patients differ, sometimes dramatically, in their manifestation of the profiled array of symptoms. This article begins to document this emotional phenomenon and will hopefully encourge other scholarly inquiries.

Review of Existing Literature

Writings concerning professorial emotional disorders/dysfunction are very scarce. Those writings that do exist focus mainly on alcohol and drug usage and abuse within this professional group.

Thoreson (1984) indicated that, "characteristics of

academics, academe, and developmental issues coalesce to produce [a] high risk to alcoholism among college and university faculty members." He indicated that the "cardinal characteristics" of the academic personality, "enobled, tragic, and lonely" are valued and considered as positive by academics and are indistinguishable from the common danger signals of mid-stage alcoholism. This study indicates that "vaguely defined performance standards, low supervision, and low visibility of performance" can be contributors or enablers to the exascerbation of the alcoholism or other emotional dysfunctions. Roman (1980) supported and elaborated on these same ideas. Caliguri, (1987) besides discussing these enabling influences, mentions others: a high need for achievement, tenure protecting dysfunction, being able to arrange teaching time around drinking time, and the loneliness of researching and publication. He also mentions the following additional "pressures:" consulting, conferences, keeping up in one's field, and the ambivalence created by wanting teaching, but wanting the rewards of greater income and status in more mercenary-type organizations.

Leung (1980) was to conclude that, based on a study conducted in a large urban university, "faculty use slightly more alcohol and marijuana [proportionately]" than the general population.

Donavan (1980) mentions that detection and employee assistance initiatives for alcohol abuse/addiction often are not effective because faculty do not consider themselves as "employees," and among the faculty there is a great tolerance for deviance or eccentricity. Donavan seems to imply that deviance is not only tolerated, but expected as a part of the "trappings" of the professorate. This tolerance creates an environment where detrimental drinking behavior and other dysfunctions can survive undetected.

Hochhauer (1980) indicates that time structure seems to be a factor in this discussion of faculty function/dysfunction. He indicated that faculty who consult outside of their teaching activities are more productive in their teaching and university activities than their non-consulting colleagues. Those with more wasteful use of time outside of the university seem to be less productive on campus and it would seem less attitudinally healthy.

Much writing exists which indicates disquiet in the professorate in general. Burgan (1988) mentions that this profession needs to pursue a quest for "self-

definition," indicating a low level of self-identity and direction generally in the profession. Walter (1988) stated that "the college as 'colleaguedom' died when it [the college] became too large." Other similar articles express concern about the dissolving of the professional "community" on campuses and intense unrest motivated by salary disputes primarily.

Kirkpatrick (1988) painted a very negative picture of the academic environment, indicating much attitudinal unhealthiness. He stated,"Some professors seem to have an instinct for the jugular that is driven by a combination of petty interests, wounded egos, compelling ambition, and perhaps malevalent, sadistic pleasure....On the campus there is often a climate of fear that, if not self generated, is imposed from without by pressures to complete a graduate degree, to get better student evaluations, or to publish something within a defined time limit." He continues,"....many are often contemptuous of their peers, autocratic with students, and tend to spend considerable time on some pet projects or just plain loafing."

This very minimal existing literature just cited mentions some common factors which contribute to or foster emotional disorders among the professorate. This would seem to support the existence of an in-common emotionally negating process, and the need to generalize a profile to understand and diagnose this phenomenon. This discussion attempts to be more specific than the existing literature and creates a descriptive statement which will encourage empirical studies in this topic area.

Definition of "Professorial Melancholia"

Professorial melancholia (PM) in this paper is defined as a progressive emotional process characterized by the negating of a university professor's professional motivation, positive attitudinal focus, and personal self-esteem. PM has three stages: early stage, where causal factors are beginning to have their detrimental effect, middle stage, where the initial causal factors are progressing in their influence and are noticeably having their impact, and late stage, where the impact of PM is most noticeable and impactful on the professor's environment, performance, and lifestyle in a negative, if not extremely negative manner.

Early Stage

Albert Ellis, the originator of Rational-Emotive

Therapy, indicates that a person's conflict is very often created by a perception of self and self's world that is irrational. He indicated twelve "irrational beliefs" which are typically found to be internalized by persons in conflict. Two of these belief systems are important to this PM discussion:

a.--We must be thoroughly competent, adequate, intelligent, and achieving in all possible respects.

b.--We must be loved by everyone and everyone must approve of everything we do.

Irrational belief "a" indicates a person who is a perfectionist and needs to perceive self as perfect and his/her contribution to the world as perfect, in order to feel satisfied and conflict-free. Perfectionism in the student life of the professor is reinforced by the processes of academia. As student, the future professor may be "perfect:" straight A's! The student may gain much adulation, praise, attention, and success. This person may be able in the capacity of student to "be thoroughly competent, adequate, intelligent, and achieving in all possible respects (and let us add "at all possible times!") Through this vehicle of academic achievement brings about accomplishment of "b," "[to be] loved by everyone and everyone must approve of everything we do." The person is truly a "star" and becomes dependent on being a "star" to gain his/her sense of worth. The grading process of the student life may acclimate the student to immediate gratification of receiving "A's." Also, this process may foster in the student an "out-of-self" focus, that self-worth is created by the environment's input and regulated by its influence: maximal and perfect input creates high self-worth, minimal and imperfect input creates low self-worth.

The student may become a professor because he/she has developed a strong affection for the academic environment that had "fed" him/her so well for many years as a student. The ultimate academic star: "the new Ph.D." enters the professorate with many years of conditioning and reinforcement in the way of perceiving self and the world.

The new professor finds himself/herself in the same environment, but in truth, a different arena. He/she is now not a "cherished student-who-makes-me-look-good," but a potentially threatening colleague who can make a colleague's "star" look less shiny. The conditioned out-of-self focused person may be now receiving "starvation-

inducing" cues from the environment, instead of the "star producing" cues he/she was accustomed to throughout the developmental years. The star begins to "tarnish." This can be very painful. The self-worth of this person begins to become affected.

Adulation from colleagues may be lacking, but may also be lacking from students. The new professor may receive, at least initially, the "intro" classes with non-majors who may not be very interested in the subject area, or at least not up to the interest expectations of the new professor. The professor cherishes the subject area at least because it has been the vehicle for the professor's success, but also because this professor has a love and devotion for the concepts and intellectual processes of this discipline. The students may be perceived as "desecrating" the cherished study.

The new professor may be beginning to experience true hurt from a "non-nurturing" (or non-adulating) environment. To protect self from the lack of the "perfect" performance, various defense mechanisms are adapted. Displacement or blaming may be utilized. "They cannot understand me, I'm too intelligent and they're obviously not!" This can be used with students and colleagues. Isolation can also be used. The professor can withdraw from the hurtful stimuli, both psychologically and physically. The more the person moves away from students, the less the faculty person can understand their needs, and the less he/she can accommodate their needs. Student resistance and student disapproval which are cues that will realistically occur in the best teacher's classroom, creates and adds to the hurt, which leads to beginning resentment, discouragement, frustration, beginnings of self-fortification, and continuing withdrawal. Isolation and withdrawal symptoms may be manifested by "egocentricities:" forgetfulness, non-involvement, "other worldliness" ("mind a million miles away"), etc.

Another PM contributing factor would include the fact that initially his/her academic studies never prepared the person for socially dealing with students. Studies, at least in graduate studies, were somewhat "cloistered-like experiences," but now he/she is faced with a social function. The social involvement with students and colleagues is a pressure in itself, especially since he/she is expected to interact in a "nurturing" way. The presently malnurtured trying to nurture? As the withdrawal from hurtful stimuli continues, loneliness increases.

It should be mentioned here that even if the irrationally perfectionistic person does receive positive cues from others, he/she may not perceive these cues as adequate, and therefore dismantle the cues and not allow their impact to nurture. The irrational belief system(s) can begin to institute a no-gratification, fruitless lifestyle.

In some academic environments publishing may be demanded or strongly encouraged, and this to a perfectionistic person will create a strong fear of failure which may become a "fear of imperfection" process. In the "publish or perish" schools this is a constant fear and very fatiguing. Because of this "fear of imperfection" some faculty in the strongly encouraged schools may not publish, and may enter into a process of denial/avoidance/displacement: blaming persons or issues outside of themselves for not publishing. These excuses may include: not enough university support services from administration, inadequate release time, not enough remuneration, etc. As feelings of self-worth decreases, the withdrawal increases, and the person may feel inadequate internally which fosters feelings of self as fraudulent in his/her role as Clance (1985) discussed in the Impostor Phenomenon, making functioning all the more difficult. The dysfunction, in the professor's mind, becomes the university's fault (the defense mechanism of displacement).

Some other factors we will discuss includes a "payback" frustration, an upward mobility issue, a life structure factor, an issue concerning tenure, and the nature of a reinforcing environment.

An out-of-self focused person may perceive the monetary, status, and respect rewards to be not as great as in some other professions or environments, and this may cause frustration and resentment. "After all that I have gone through, I deserve more!" The "payback" is not perfect enough to reinforce the person's self-worth. Also, in this professional field the possibility for upward mobility is limited, although promotions may come, additional power and authority does not, unless the person wants to leave the professorate and enter the field of administration. As the person ages, his/her job function stays the same with no real increase in the potency of the position. This may induce frustration and may cause the professor to enter into frivolous power gestures or games of "one-up -manship" with peers, students, and administrators. These gestures unfortunately, are of very little ultimate consequence. The professor is in essence utilizing a

projected form of the defense mechanism of reaction -formation or scapegoatism, by which a person diminishes another to feel increased self-power.

An out-of-self focused person often needs not only environmental gratifiers to ensure self-worth, but also an outside structure to ensure functioning. The process of tenure is a most interesting organizational phenomenon, since it renders a school's administration in many cases impotent, thereby rendering an out-of-self focused person's external structure lacking enforcement power. Therefore, if the out-of-self focused person cannot rally internal motivation and internal gratifiers for scholarly activities, then they do not function. This person may start to resent the tenure "womb" he/she lives in, because it ensures employment, but also ensures dysfunction.

This professor experiencing the onset of "professorial melancholia" may then associate with other sufferers, who may be more advanced in their dysfunction than himself/herself. The environment, therefore, may actively feed into this attitudinal malady. Figure 1 summarizes this initial stage.

Middle Stage

The middle stage of PM, as displayed in Figure 2, indicates a worsening of the contributing factors that were discussed in the early stage. As these factors worsen, delusion increases, meaning that the person cannot look at self with a realistic focus or cannot perceive his/her reality with clarity.

As time passes, and as the hurt goes uncared for, as is indicated in Figure 2, the professor becomes more disillusioned in his/her career, depression increases, the original philosophical motivation diminishes, resentment of students increase, projection of self-disgust increases, and scholarly interest/activity diminishes.

Late Stage

Time passes and the contributing factors render more damage to the professor. As indicated in Figure 3, students may now be considered as enemies. Verbiage of the professor may betray this attitude very clearly. Words of the professor in class, in office, and in faculty meetings may indicate disrespect and anger, even rage.

The professor in this state may not feel as though he/she "belongs" in this career function. The

Figure 1

Professorial Melancholia: A Progressive Cycle of Diminishing Returns

EARLY STAGE

Contributing Factors	Outcome
--Irrational Belief Systems Societally Induced --"The Tarnished Star" Factor --Out-of-Self Focus --"The Desecration of the Discipline" Factor --Student Resistance --Cues of Student Disapproval-Real & Unreal --"From the Cloister to the Social Forum" --"Inadequate" Organizational Response --Loneliness --Publishing and Fear of Imperfection --"Payback" frustration (anger displacement) following dissertation and/or graduate studies (monetary, status, respect) --Life Structure --Upward Mobility Issue --Tenure-safety= love/hate response --Environment with a potential for noxious response	--hurt --resentment of students beginning --discouragement --frustration begins --beginnings of self-fortification --withdrawal focus begins --beginnings of Administration-focused dissatisfaction

person experiences feelings of what Rogers called incongruency between self and experience, not fitting in his/her reality. The "Imposter Phenomenon" (Clance, 1985) deepens.

The withdrawal which we had discussed earlier has progressed over time to become deep psychological entrenchment and alienation. The defense mechanisms may become more pronounced. Withdrawal may manifest itself with elitism and arrogance: distance is ensured through these devices.

Thanatos or self-disgust dominancy may become very obvious in his/her manner of speaking and behaving. Cynicism is an example of self-disgust projected and "algolagnia" (Sullivan, 1957) is an extreme form of advanced and constant cynicism.

Also a professor in this late stage may perceive his/her students as "talking about me," "none of them like me," and the administration would "want to get rid of me, if they could," some possible evidence of pseudo-paranoid ideations or at least, some unrealistic generalized thinking.

A professor who experiences this late stage may become emotionally, intellectually, and philosophically spent. Some may view this as "burnout," but it seems to be a more impactful and insidious process than that. A state of considering nothing of value in his/her career may generalize to other life activities. Low self-esteem and fear keeps him/her from leaving the profession. It is interesting that persons even in misery very often do not change behaviors, since their perspective records abnormal as normal, and the condition may be recorded as terrible, but they have developed mechanisms to live with their difficulties.

Depending on other life supports, the professor suffering from PM, especially late stage, may be prone to alcohol abuse, drug abuse, interrelationship problems, sexual promiscuity with students and others, verbal or grade abuse towards students, rage reactions, and even possibly suicide. This might become a pseudo-anomie state, where life activities may seem as valueless, contributing to a normless-like, out-of-control lifestyle. This person suffering from late stage PM is experiencing psychic pain, but also stimulus deprivation. These mentioned deviations help to relieve the person by offering some stimulation, but unfortunately, this type of stimulation contributes to a lessening, instead of an

Figure 2

Professorial Melancholia: A Progressive Cycle of Diminishing Returns

MIDDLE STAGE

Contributing Factors	Outcome
—Early Stage Contributing Factors Augmented by Increased Delusion Over Time Caused by Diminishing Self-Esteem.	--Increased Disillusionment --Increased Depression --Loss of Philosophical Motivation --Resentment of Students Increase --Fortification Increases --Projection of Self-Disgust Increases as Self-Esteem Decreases (Criticalness, Unjustified Anger) --Diminished Scholarly Interest (Why bother, who cares?)= stimulus deprivation= work becomes hurtful drudgery & repetitious

elevating of self-esteem.

The progressiveness of professorial melancholia follows no determined time frame. The rapidity of this disorder depends on the intensity of the initial contributing factors, ego strength of the person, other personal, social, professional characteristics/circumstances, as well as other life happenings and life supports which may, of course, intensify or diminish the intensity of PM.

Self-Treatment and Formalized Treatment for PM in the Professor

The professor will need to diminish the tendencies of the emotional suppression of the PM. Catharsis, or release of pent-up energies/anxieties, is an important ingredient in good mental health; containment or suppression contributes to the mental maladies as indicated in this document. A cathartic process is vital for this person to realize and freely express feelings to increase feelings of natural release, ease, and relaxation (Machell, 1987).

It is also important for this person to gain insight into his/her underlying irrationality of self-beliefs, and to gain fluency in healthy esteem-inducing social interactions to counteract the withdrawal and isolation. In the treatment process, even in cases with very willing clients, unhealthy conditioning may direct the person to utilize the professor role to deny, sabotage, and/or prevent the treatment from being effective. Therapists who are not intimidated by the Ph.D. and/or Professor aura are essential. They must also be skilled in helping a person of this profession to "feel" and not to intellectualize away feelings, or to enter into intellectual combat to disprove the practices and teachings of the treatment fields. A very frightened, irrational person is usually underneath all of this game playing.

Conclusion

I have seen such gifted and sensitive persons become dysfunctional as a result of what I have called "professorial melancholia." A potentially magical lifestyle has become misery for these persons. Counseling treatment which directly addresses this professional role dysfunction can be helpful. It is vitally important that therapists who provide treatment to these persons for PM see these issues in their totality, as important lifestyle and life support concerns that need to be addressed in order to create

Figure 3

Professorial Melancholia: A Progressive Cycle of Diminishing Returns

LATE STAGE

Contributing Factors	Outcome
--Contributing Factors Strongly Reinforced Over Time with Delusion Substantially Increased	--Students as Enemies --Incongruency Between Self and Experience --Psychologically Entrenched --Deep Alienation --Pretends/Utilizes Elitism (Arrogance) --Thanatos Dominant Intensely Cynical (Algolagnia) --Pseudo-Paranoid Ideations --Emotionally/Intellectually /Philosophically Spent, Burnout) --Pseudo-Anomie State (Life activities as valuelessness, contributing to normless-like lifestyle)

In this stage the person may be prone to alcohol abuse, drug usage, interrelationship problems, sexual promiscuity with students and others, verbal or grade abuse towards students, rage reactions, suicidal behavior.

solidness in any recovery process which attempts to foster psychological healthiness.

Carl Jung (1968) stated, "One is impressed again and again by the fact that the growth of the mind is the widening of the range of consciousness, and that each step forward has been a most painful and laborious achievement." For some, the growth does not progress past a particular point, and unfortunately, their pain creates a weakening withdrawal and not strength.

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